



Cambodia is a land where ancient tradition and modern resilience meet. To travel here respectfully and safely in 2026, you need to balance deep-rooted Buddhist customs with practical awareness of local laws and safety.

Here is the comprehensive guide to the **Do's and Don'ts** for Cambodia.

Religious & Cultural Etiquette

The Khmer people are deeply proud of their heritage. Respecting their spiritual boundaries is the fastest way to earn local favour.

- **DO cover shoulders and knees.** This is strictly enforced at Angkor Wat and all pagodas. A scarf over the shoulders is often not enough; aim for actual sleeves and long trousers/skirts.
- **DO remove shoes and hats.** This applies when entering a temple (vihara), a person's home, or even some local boutique shops. If you see a pile of flip-flops at the door, add yours to it.
- **DO the "Sampeah" greeting.** Place your palms together at chest level with a slight bow. For elders or monks, place your hands higher (nose level).
- **DON'T touch anyone's head.** The head is the most sacred part of the body. Even ruffling a child's hair is considered a spiritual transgression.
- **DON'T point your feet.** Feet are the "lowest" part of the body. Never point them at people, monks, or Buddha statues. When sitting on a floor mat, tuck your legs behind you.
- **DON'T touch a monk.** Specifically for women, any physical contact with a monk is a major taboo. To give something to a monk, place it on a cloth or table for them to pick up.

Money & Market Manners

As of 2026, Cambodia is pushing for more "Riel-centric" commerce, though the USD remains common.

- **DO check your USD bills for tears.** Any tiny rip or heavy wear will result in the bill being rejected. Large bills (\$50, \$100) are heavily scrutinized for counterfeits.
- **DO use the local Riel for small buys.** For anything under \$5, use Riel. In 2026, many shops are required to display prices in Riel (\$1 \approx 4,000–4,100 KHR).
- **DO haggle with a smile.** It is expected in markets, but "losing face" by getting angry over 50 cents will end the negotiation immediately.
- **DON'T give money to children.** It encourages them to stay out of school to beg. If you want to help, donate to organizations like *Friends-International* or buy from social enterprise cafes.



Laws & Safety Warnings

- **DON'T criticize the Monarchy.** Lèse-majesté laws are strictly enforced. Avoid negative comments or jokes about the King or Royal Family, especially on social media.
- **DON'T stray off the path.** In rural areas (especially near the Thai border or Battambang), landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) remain a lethal risk. Only walk on well-marked trails.
- **DON'T photograph military sites.** This includes government buildings and airports. Your camera may be confiscated, or you could face questioning.
- **DO be vigilant of "Bag Snatching."** In Phnom Penh, drive-by snatches are common. Wear your bag across your chest and away from the street side while walking or in a tuk-tuk.

Dining & Socializing

- **DO wait for the eldest to eat first.** It's a sign of respect at the dinner table.
- **DO use a spoon and fork.** Use the fork in your left hand to push food onto the spoon in your right. Chopsticks are generally reserved for noodle soups.
- **DO use your right hand.** Use it for giving or receiving money, gifts, or food. The left hand is traditionally associated with personal hygiene.
- **DON'T lose your cool.** Public displays of anger, shouting, or aggressive behaviour are viewed as a total lack of character and will cause everyone around you to feel uncomfortable.

Health & Environment

- **DO drink only bottled or filtered water.** Tap water is generally not safe. In 2026, look for "Refill Not Landfill" stations to reduce plastic waste.
- **DO use high-DEET mosquito repellent.** Dengue fever and Chikungunya are prevalent in tourist hubs. Protect yourself at dawn and dusk.
- **DON'T feed the monkeys.** Especially around Angkor Wat, they can be aggressive and may carry rabies. A bite will require an expensive and immediate medical evacuation.

2026 Travel Quick-Check

Situation	The "Right" Way
Greeting	<i>Sampeah</i> (Prayer gesture) + "Chum Reap Sour"
Currency	USD for hotels/tours; Riel for street food/tuk-tuks
Transport	Use apps like Grab or PassApp for fixed pricing
Dress Code	Shoulders and knees covered (Temple-ready)